

The Honorable Benjamin H. Settle

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT TACOMA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Plaintiff,
v.
DONNIE BARNES, SR.,
Defendant.

| NO. CR18-5141 BHS

GOVERNMENT'S MOTION IN LIMINE TO EXCLUDE IMPROPER REFERENCES TO PUNISHMENT

NOTING DATE: October 29, 2019

The United States of America, by and through Brian T. Moran, United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington, and Matthew P. Hampton and Lyndsie R. Schmalz, Assistant United States Attorneys for said District, hereby submits this motion *in limine* to preclude the presentation of evidence or argument referring to the potential custodial punishment or other collateral consequences the Defendant faces if found guilty. The government has conferred with counsel for the defense, who have indicated that, at this time, they have made no decision regarding whether they plan to present such evidence or argument to the jury.

I. ARGUMENT

Any argument related to the potential penalty that could be imposed, or the collateral consequences of a conviction, should be excluded as irrelevant and prejudicial.

1 A jury's sole function in a criminal prosecution is to determine guilt or innocence; it does
 2 not impose sentence. As the Supreme Court held in *Shannon v. United States*:

3 The principle that juries are not to consider the consequences of their
 4 verdicts is a reflection of the basic division of labor in our legal system
 5 between the judge and jury. The jury's function is to find the facts and to
 6 decide whether, on those facts, the defendant is guilty of the crime charged.
 7 The judge, by contrast, imposes sentence on the defendant after the jury has
 arrived at a guilty verdict. Information regarding the consequences of a
 verdict is therefore irrelevant to the jury's task.

8 512 U.S. 573, 579 (1994); *see also United States v. Sherpa*, 97 F.3d 1239, 1244–45 (9th
 9 Cir. 1996) (“[S]entencing is the province of the judge, not the jury”).

10 This understanding of the jury's role is expressly addressed in the Ninth Circuit's
 11 Model Jury Instructions, which the Ninth Circuit urges trial courts to use. Model
 12 Instruction 7.4 provides that:

13 The punishment provided by law for this crime is for the court to decide.
 14 You may not consider punishment in deciding whether the government has
 proved its case against the defendant beyond a reasonable doubt.

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 16 The Ninth Circuit has not signaled any willingness to revisit or undermine the legal
 17 principles contained in this instruction. One month ago, in September 2019, the Ninth
 18 Circuit Jury Instructions Committee reviewed and approved Model Instruction 7.4 for use
 19 in criminal trials. The Ninth Circuit has also recently rejected a challenge to the reading
 20 of this instruction in a criminal trial involving a mandatory minimum sentence. *United*
 21 *States v. Lynch*, 903 F.3d 1061, 1081 (9th Cir. 2018) (holding that *Shannon* “remains
 22 binding law,” and Model Instruction 7.4 is an accurate statement of that law).

23 The rationale for excluding evidence of punishment or the consequences of
 24 conviction is readily apparent: such evidence is not probative of guilt or innocence, the
 25 only question the jury is called upon to decide. Instead, evidence relating to the
 26 punishment and the effects of conviction serve only to confuse the jury and compromise
 27 the verdict. In *Shannon*, the Supreme Court explained the inherent risk attached to
 28 presenting a jury with this evidence in stark terms. “[P]roviding jurors sentencing

1 information invites them to ponder matters that are not within their province, distracts
2 them from their fact-finding responsibilities, and creates a strong possibility of
3 confusion.” 512 U.S. at 579.

4 Applying this rationale, it would be improper for the Defendant to argue or
5 attempt to introduce evidence concerning the possibility of being incarcerated or the
6 mandatory minimum sentence that he faces if convicted. *United States v. Feuer*, 403
7 Fed. App'x 538, 540 (2d Cir. 2010) (holding that, absent exceptional circumstances, a
8 "defendant has no legal right to introduce evidence or argument regarding sentencing
9 consequences"). It would also be improper for the Defendant to argue or reference any
10 collateral consequences he faces if convicted. Such evidence and arguments are not
11 relevant to the charged offenses, and would serve only to draw the attention of the jury
12 away from its chief function as the trier of fact and invite jury nullification.

II. CONCLUSION

14 For the foregoing reasons, the United States respectfully requests that the Court
15 preclude evidence and argument related to the potential punishment faced upon
16 conviction. Such argument and evidence are irrelevant to the ultimate issue of the

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MOTIONS IN LIMINE – 3
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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
700 STEWART STREET, SUITE 5220
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98101
(206) 553-7970

1 Defendant's guilt or innocence and would only risk compromising the impartiality of the
2 jury's verdict.

3 DATED this 18th day of October, 2019.
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5 Respectfully submitted,
6

7 BRIAN T. MORAN
8 United States Attorney
9

10 /s/ Matthew Hampton
11 MATTHEW P HAMPTON

12 /s/ Lyndsie Schmalz
13 LYNDSIE R. SCHMALZ

14 Assistant United States Attorneys
15 700 Stewart Street, Suite 5220
16 Seattle, WA 98101-1271
17 Phone: (206) 553-6677
18 Fax: (206) 553-0755
19 E-mail: Matthew.Hampton@usdoj.gov
20 Lyndsie.R.Schmalz@usdoj.gov

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on October 18, 2019, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of Court using the CM/ECF system which will send notification of such filing to the attorney(s) of record for the defendant(s). I hereby certify that I have served the attorney(s) of record for the defendant(s) that are non CM/ECF participants via e-mail and/or telefax.

s/ Lissette Duran
LISSETTE DURAN
Paralegal Specialist
United States Attorney's Office
Western District of Washington
700 Stewart Street, Suite 5220
Seattle, Washington 98101-1271
Telephone: (206) 553-7234
Fax: (206) 553-2502
E-mail: Lissette.I.Duran@usdoj.gov